

VZCZCXYZ0013  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGB #2832/01 2950752  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 220752Z OCT 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5183  
INFO RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0097  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0005  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 0045  
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO 0010  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0021  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 0040  
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 2285

UNCLAS BAGHDAD 002832

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR ECA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OEXC](#) [SCUL](#) [CVIS](#)

SUBJECT: OPERATION IRAQI BASEBALL: TIGRIS TIGERS VISIT EMBASSY

REF: STATE 90799

¶1. Summary: In support of Section IV of the Strategic Framework Agreement, PAS hosts a number of cultural and social exchanges to forge stronger connections between our citizens, with particular emphasis on youth. Baseball and softball are two sports that are central to our culture and form the basis for wide ranging social and personal exchanges. To encourage such exchanges in Iraq, PAS is engaging with the nascent Iraq Baseball Federation. Post hopes to send Iraqi baseball players and coaches to the U.S. on a Sports Visitor program and, eventually, to welcome a baseball Sports Envoy.

¶2. The Ambassador hosted members of the Iraq National baseball team, the "Tigris Tigers," along with several of the Tigers women's softball team members for lunch and some fielding and hitting drills on October 10. Baseball and softball are not widely known in Iraq, but with recent support from U.S. donors, the Embassy and Major League Baseball, there is a chance that the sports could begin to flourish. End Summary.

Play Ball!

¶3. The Baghdad-based Tigris Tigers, recently outfitted by the generosity of U.S. uniform company Ebbets Field, had no equipment until their plight was highlighted this summer in several McClatchy articles and their cause was then championed by Rachel Maddow on MSNBC. At an Embassy barbecue on October 10, the young Iraqi men and women engaged in spirited conversation with embassy officers about our national pastime. Sketches of plays, and rules and strategies helped bridge the language gap. Televised highlights of U.S. baseball games also provided entertainment. After lunch, the Iraqi baseball and softball players received practical tips from, and practiced with, Embassy staff who share their love of the game. Eight baseball players and four softball players were accompanied to the two and a half hour event by the Secretary General of the Iraq Baseball Federation and their coach.

Universal Language of Beisbol

¶4. The Ambassador, wearing a signed Daisuke Matsuzaka Red Sox jersey, told the Iraqi players that the Japanese pitcher had succeeded in the major leagues for three years without speaking English, noting that it does not take English to throw the ball hard. He lauded the group's efforts to learn a quintessentially American game and encouraged them to continue their efforts. He awarded the women's softball team's catcher with an Embassy coin, honoring her as MVP of the barbecue and scrimmage - despite a bloody nose from a fast pitch, she was smiling when she left the Embassy.

## Baseball Across Iraq?

¶15. The Iraq Baseball Federation's Secretary General Ali Abdul Hussein Jassim told emboffs that Baghdad, Basra, Maysan, Mosul, Diwaniya, and Kirkuk are each home to men's baseball and women's softball teams. (NOTE: The teams are likely little more than a group of interested players who meet occasionally. END NOTE) Assistant Coach Yasir Abdul Hassan Mazyan noted that teams face difficult conditions; they lack sponsorship and play games in sandlots or on soccer fields and have limited regulation equipment. Coach Bashar Salah Jabbar recounted how on August 12, representatives of McClatchy News Services delivered mitts, cleats, bats, and baseballs donated by a New York sporting goods company to his team. Press reports note that the Tigers are the national team by dint of having won a tournament versus the other teams in Iraq Qby dint of having won a tournament versus the other teams in Iraq and were reconstituted from a team that was disbanded during the height of the insurgency. Coach Bashar told emboff that extremists threatened him in emails and telephone calls, accusing him and his teammates of playing "an 'Occupation' game."

## Bases Loaded: Tigers Fans in the MLB

¶16. On October 7, the bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs told post that Major League Baseball (MLB) responded favorably to the request for assistance for the Tigers and the Iraq Baseball Federation (IBF). In addition to rule books, instructional videos and equipment, MLB pledged to send equipment for adults as well as 10-14 year olds. Emboffs are seeking partners at youth centers and/or sports clubs to build Iraq's first Little League baseball team. In addition to equipment, Iraq lacks dedicated fields to play on. Post is working with the Iraq Baseball Federation and relevant city officials to help secure land for a field.

## Spring Training

¶17. Per ECA's call in reftel, post has applied to send a group of Iraqi players and coaches to the U.S. in March 2010 to attend a skills camp and observe MLB spring training as part of a sports diplomacy program.

## Sport in Iraq

¶18. Soccer remains the king of team sports in Iraq, followed closely by basketball and handball. As we develop more cultural and growth exchanges as per the Strategic Framework Agreement, we will continue to expand our sports programming to connect to Iraqi youth. There is interest in baseball and with encouragement and some funding, prospects to develop baseball in Iraq are looking up.

FORD